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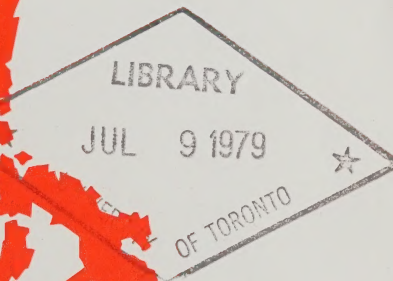
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Federalism throughout the world





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Federalism throughout the world

Federalism is a subject of discussion both in Canada and abroad. Just what kind of political system is it? What is its origin? Have other countries adopted it? This paper tries to answer these questions by giving a historical and geographical overview of federalism as it has developed throughout the world.

I. Leafing through your history book

The United States of America, founded in 1776, began as a confederal union or confederation. This type of political system proved unsatisfactory because economic, political and military power was much too decentralized, and prevented the population from really benefiting from all the advantages of union. Thus, the confederal system was rejected in 1787 and replaced by a federal system. The principles of the American model were to be an important influence on most federal systems developed later. It demonstrated how sharing technical knowledge and resources can contribute to the rapid progress of an entire country.

Influence of technology and economics

The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century completely altered the means of production and the economic relations among countries. Major inventions led to the development of new technology. As a result, goods were no longer produced by hand in small workshops; the steam engine and machine tools made it possible to manufacture goods in large

quantities in factories. Industrial areas developed, while rural craftsmanship disappeared. Work was no longer done to order as it had been previously. Instead, goods were made cheaply in bulk and then wider and wider markets were sought for them. New means of transport made it possible to distribute goods over a larger area.

Thus trade was transformed as traders were able to distribute enormous quantities of industrial and agricultural products farther abroad. Business, which had been limited to small shops and town markets, expanded as the consumer markets spread beyond regional and national boundaries, and across oceans.

In the face of this new economic situation, characterized by industrialization and increasing interdependence among regions and nations, men began to think about their forms of political organization. In these circumstances, federalism has emerged as the system best suited for preserving regional individuality while at the same time ensuring unity for the whole. Economically, it enables the various regions to get what they need from the others and makes it possible for the central government through its programs to improve the lot of all citizens. Moreover, the federation has greater negotiating strength on the international level than any member state would have alone. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, federalism offered the democracies a political organization capable of stabilizing and controlling increasing trade.

Influence of political and military events

Switzerland, following the example of the United States, tried out a confederal system before opting for federalism through changes in its constitution in 1848 and 1874. The Swiss chose a federal system

to enable them to increase their economic and military security while at the same time preserving their languages and cultures.

In the 19th century, Canada, Australia and Brazil also chose federal systems.

The cataclysmic events that the world has experienced in the 20th century, even if we only consider the two world wars, have led many countries in search of greater stability to adopt federalism. Mexico became a federation in 1917. Venezuela and Argentina became federations after World War II. In August 1949, the whole world watched the election of the first federal parliament in West Germany. India, which became independent from Great Britain in 1947, chose three years later to establish a federal system.

In Africa, the process of decolonization encourages the growth of federalism, since the system allows different ethnic groups to join together and form independent countries while retaining their special characteristics. Nigeria, which has a population of more than 60 million, and Cameroon, with a population of only six million, both decided as newly-independent countries to establish federal systems. South Africa adopted a federal system in 1910, and retained the system when it became a republic in 1961.

In Europe, Yugoslavia adopted federal institutions in 1947, while Czechoslovakia has been working under such a system since 1970.

II. Leafing through your contemporary geography book

The federal system can take a number of different forms, although in general it enables the various countries that adopt it to enjoy greater economic and political strength while at the same time respecting the special character of the regions.

Switzerland, for example, chose the federal system because it is best suited to responding to the needs of that country's three large language groups — German, French, and Italian. Article 146 of the Swiss constitution in fact recognizes three official languages. Of the 22 Swiss cantons (a canton being more or less equivalent to a province here in Canada) there are 18 unilingual cantons, three bilingual ones and one which is trilingual. Furthermore, the Swiss federal system guarantees each citizen the right to communicate with the central government and to stand trial in any one of the three official languages.

In the United States, the federal system is a presidential one, not a parliamentary system as in Canada. Regional interests are protected, since each state elects two members to the Senate whatever the size of the state's population. As a result, the American Senate can speak for the states and truly reflects the federal nature of the political system. At the same time, the American population as a whole elects the president whose responsibility it is to promote the national interest.

Finally, this survey brings us to West Germany, where the federal system has also been adapted to local conditions. The West German constitution, which is recent and modern, is extremely flexible.

Rather than establish clear divisions between the area of jurisdiction of the Bund, or central parliament, and the Länder (which are the equivalent of provinces), the Germans allowed for a broad field of concurrent legislation, but with the federal right taking precedence over that of the Länder. The Federal Republic of Germany is homogeneous, but it has not invested its central government with authority in cultural matters. The constitution reserves responsibility in this area for the Länder, but they in turn have preferred to develop cultural policy on a national rather than a regional basis. This is another example of federalism adapting to the desires of the citizenry as a whole.

Almost half of the human race is now living under a federal system. This kind of system has been established on every continent to respond to the needs of all the citizens without, however, neglecting their individual characteristics. In some cases, the federal system is adopted as a means of uniting different language or ethnic groups, while in others it is made necessary and desirable by the vast expanse of territory to be governed. In every case, however, the central government and the member states co-operate to create better services for the country's population. Whether they be Canadian provinces, Swiss cantons or American states, each member unit safeguards the particular regional character, while the Canadian Parliament, the German Bund or the American president preserves the solidarity and interdependence which promise progress for the citizenry as a whole.

List of existing federal systems

The Americas	Argentina Brazil Canada United States Mexico Venezuela
Europe	West Germany Switzerland Czechoslovakia USSR Yugoslavia
Asia	India Malaysia
Africa	South Africa Cameroon Nigeria
Oceania	Australia

*Source: Europa Year Book 1971
A World Survey
Europa Publications, London*

This text does not necessarily represent the official position of the Government of Canada but seeks to contribute to the dialogue on this subject.



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